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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/21/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: U/S BURNS OCT 14-16 VISIT TO COLOMBIA: GOC LOOKS  
TOWARDS USG TRANSITION

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield  
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

1. (U) Under Secretary Bill Burns met with President Uribe and Foreign Minister Bermudez during his October 14-16 visit to Colombia. President Uribe underscored the importance to Colombia of the Colombia Free Trade Promotion Act (CTPA) and continued USG support in its fight against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Bermudez suggested an informal meeting with the Secretary before year's end to continue the close bilateral relationship. UN and OAS officials briefed on their positive relationship with the Colombian military and their continued dialogue with the Ministry of Defense regarding human rights. Business leaders made predictions on the future of Colombia's economy and the crossroads it has reached. End summary.

URIBE: CTPA CRITICAL

2. (C) President Uribe said Colombia is close to defeating the FARC, but continued U.S. assistance is critical to help it finish the job. Congressional approval of the CPTA will help Colombia attract the investment needed to create jobs and boost growth. Uribe acknowledged U.S. congressional concerns about violence against Colombian labor leaders and reviewed GOC progress in prosecuting those responsible. He said Colombia will be ready to take advantage of a possible U.S. Congressional session after the November 4 elections to push the CPTA and asked for President Bush's continuing help in that regard.

3. (C) Uribe reiterated his commitment to hold accountable military personnel charged with human rights abuses. He has insisted that civilian rather than military courts investigate and prosecute military officials suspected of human rights violations. Numerous military and police personnel are currently in jail on human rights charges. The GOC is cooperating with civilian investigators in the Soacha cases, and, if guilty, the implicated parties will be punished. Uribe added that the GOC must respect due process.

4. (C) Uribe said the GOC maintains good relations with Brazil, but has sharp differences with Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. Uribe said the GOC fears the anti-private sector

approach of Venezuela and Ecuador will tarnish the region's image with investors. U.S. Congressional approval of the CPTA would help Colombia distinguish itself from its statist, undemocratic neighbors.

#### FM BERMUDEZ SUGGESTS INFORMAL PLANNING SESSION

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15. (C) Foreign Minister Bermudez suggested an informal meeting before the end of the year with Secretary Rice and other senior officials to brainstorm ways to continue the close U.S.-Colombia relationship--regardless of the outcome of the U.S. presidential race.

16. (C) Bermudez said the sentencing of extradited former paramilitary chiefs Ramiro "Cuco" Vanoy and Francisco Javier Zuluaga-Lindo--as well as Salvatore Mancuso's testimony before Colombia's Supreme Court via video link from New York--were important in addressing popular concerns that the extradited would no longer cooperate with ongoing Colombian investigations. The GOC will soon send a letter to the USG asking for assurances that extradited paramilitaries be returned to Colombia after completing their sentences.

17. (C) Bermudez said the GOC is committed to having a Defense Cooperation Agreement in place before the end of the year and said it would soon provide the USG a draft response. Bermudez said there is ambivalence in the region toward the hemispheric Pathways to Prosperity initiative. Some countries might hesitate to commit to the program without a clear early signal of interest from the incoming U.S. administration.

18. (C) Bermudez complimented the USG for not responding in kind to the bellicose rhetoric of Hugo Chavez, Rafael Correa, and Evo Morales. He urged caution on the timing of announcements such as those decertifying Bolivia and Venezuela on narcotrafficking--both of which came before the UNASUR meeting, giving those countries a regional forum to rail against Washington. Bermudez suggested micro-lending as a promising area in which the USG could engage against the Chavez model.

#### MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

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19. (C) Acting Defense Minister, Colombian Armed Forces Commander, Freddy Padilla and Vice Ministers of Defense Sergio Jaramillo and Juan Carlos Pinzon decried Venezuela's high-level support to the FARC. They described Venezuela as the greatest remaining obstacle to defeating the FARC, contending that Venezuela offers both psychological and operational breathing room to the terrorist group. Jaramillo lamented that Chavez is using his oil money to isolate Colombia. Other than the USG, the GOC could count only on the support of Mexico and Peru in the hemisphere. Padilla said the FARC has seen its communications network weakened and its former discipline corrupted by drug money. He said the group is trying to acquire man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) from Venezuela and El Salvador. Jaramillo opined that increasing FARC desertions show the GOC has reached the "tipping point" in its fight against the group.

110. (C) Padilla said protection of human rights is a core GOC goal but admitted, "we have made mistakes." Jaramillo said the GOC is working with the UNHCHR to improve its human rights record. Pinzon said the reality of decreased levels of USG support is sinking in with GOC officials. The GOC is "not happy" about the cuts, but is working on a transition plan to ensure "irreversibility" of recent GOC gains.

#### UNHCHR, UNHCR, MAPP/OAS

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111. (C) UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) Representative Javier Hernandez thanked the USG for its support, and said the Colombian military has been a leader in providing human rights training to its forces. UNHCHR

maintains a sustained dialogue with the MoD on human rights issues, and is working with it to reduce the problem of extrajudicial killings, which the UNHCHR estimates may account for eight to ten percent of the 2,400 combat killings by the military each year. He said Minister Santos is committed to addressing this issue, but added that the message has not fully reached field commanders.

¶12. (C) UN High Council on Refugees (UNHCR) representative Roberto Mignone also thanked the USG for its support of 11 field offices in Colombia, which have carried out 1,500 missions in the field. He said Colombia still has large numbers of displaced persons, adding that the debate over numbers has become politicized. Claudia Perez de Vargas, Deputy Director of the OAS Mission in Support of the Peace Process (MAPP/OAS), explained that the OAS's focus remains on verifying paramilitary demobilization, applying the Justice and Peace Law process, reintegrating demobilized paramilitaries into society, and accompanying victims in the process. In many areas, continuing conflict involving the FARC and narco-trafficking groups makes reintegration difficult.

#### BUSINESS LEADERS

¶13. (SBU) Business leaders said Colombia is at a crossroads in its economic progress. Gains made in security, economic growth, job creation and poverty reduction under President Uribe have plateaued; continued USG engagement will be critical to prevent a regression. They predicted that the mix of lower commodity prices, restricted credit and reduced U.S. demand would cause the Colombian economy to contract through at least 2009. U.S. failure to approve the CPTA and continue Plan Colombia at significant levels would exacerbate the downturn.

¶14. (U) P staff has cleared this message.  
BROWNFIELD